



**Committee on
Homeland Security Democrats**
Bennie G. Thompson, Ranking Member

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**COMMITTEE DEMOCRATS QUESTION WHETHER THE ADMINISTRATION IS
PREPARED TO RESPOND TO THE AVIAN FLU**

WASHINGTON--House Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS), and Congressman Jim Langevin (D-RI), Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on Prevention Nuclear and Biological Attack, have asked key Administration officials to confirm that they are preparing for the threat the Avian Flu poses to the United States.

In a letter to Department of Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff and Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Michael Leavitt, Reps. Thompson and Langevin request a detailed description of the plan that the Departments intend to use if the nation falls victim to an Avian Flu outbreak.

"I question whether or not our nation is properly prepared to effectively deal with an alarming health crisis such as the Avian Flu," said Rep. Thompson. "The abysmal response to this summer's hurricanes leads many to believe that the mechanisms and procedures established under the National Response Plan (NRP) for responding to terrorist attacks, natural disasters and other threats won't be carried out. A clear concise and workable response plan is crucial to the security and safety of Americans and must be implemented immediately."

The NRP was first released this January by former Department of Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge. Ridge said the plan would bring unity to the Department's response strategy. It is still unclear whether the Department of Homeland Security or the Department of Health and Human Services would be in charge if the United States faced a healthcare emergency.

In the letter sent to the Secretaries, Reps. Thompson and Langevin also underscore the need for both departments to improve their efforts to coordinate the response plans of federal, state and local governments.

"It is imperative that the Departments of Homeland Security and Health and Human Services determine a concise chain of command and set clear communication protocols. We have the benefit of advance warning that we could be facing a pandemic, and we must take advantage of whatever time we have to plan our response," said Langevin. "The departments need to start working together and working with Congress to ensure the public health system is adequately prepared to deal with the consequences of the flu."

A .pdf copy of the letter is attached.

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